

## COMMUNICATION THEOLOGY

**Frances Forde Plude**

### Further Reading

Theology, popular culture, audience-reception analysis and communication systems are converging. Some writers believe that a Communication Theology is emerging from this movement. Listed here are some helpful resources, establishing the foundations for Communication Theology. As this new field of thought develops it should help with the challenge of ministry in a wired world of local theologies and cultural pluralism.

E. Arens, *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995).

A work that builds upon the social-scientific and philosophically oriented theory of action developed by Jürgen Habermas. Arens discusses a communicative theory of action and biblical foundations of a theological theory of action.

Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication, *Media, Religion and Culture* newsletter (St. John's University, Bangkok, [www.stjohn.ac.th/arc](http://www.stjohn.ac.th/arc))

This is a valuable link to web sites and research underway throughout Asia.

T. Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1998).

Beaudoin, himself a member of Generation X, explores fashion, music videos, and cyberspace and concludes that his generation has fashioned a theology radically different from but no less potent or valid than that of their elders.

A. Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000).

The book's thesis is that iconoclasm comes in many kinds (Pagan, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Secular), but is always religious in one manner or another. It also includes a wide-ranging study of iconophilia and iconoclasm in the West.

J. Bowker, *The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978).

Explores the distinctive sense of God in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. It notes the importance of information process and systems behavior for the analysis of religious belief, applying information systems analysis to religion studies.

M. Budde, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God: Christianity and Global Culture Industries* (Westview, Boulder, Colorado, 1997).

H. Campbell and J. Mitchell (eds.), *Interactions: Theology Meets Film, TV and the Internet* (Centre for Theology and Public Issues, Edinburgh, 1999).

This journal explores a spiritual renaissance in popular culture, film, TV and the Internet. It also includes information about the Media and Theology Project at New College, University of Edinburgh.

J. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Unwin Hyman, Winchester, 1989).

This work helped to establish the ground for cultural approaches to the study of communication and modern society.

C. Christians and J. Van Hook (eds.), *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1981).

A series of essays on the work of the Protestant lay theologian, Jacques Ellul. The volume includes an extensive bibliography of Ellul's works and an Epilogue by Ellul.

H. De Vries and Samuel Weber (eds.), *Religion and Media* (Stanford University Press, California, 2001).

Twenty-five contributors to this volume – who include Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Talad Asad, and James Siegel – confront the conceptual, analytical, and empirical difficulties involved in addressing the complex relationship between religion and media.

A. Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (Crossroad, New York, 1992).

The author explores theology as symbolic communication and seeks a dynamic equilibrium between continuity and innovation. He explores the cultural-linguistic aspects of theology and notes that religions are predominately characterized by their symbols.

A. Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1998).

In the chapter 'The Church and Communications: Vatican II and Beyond' Dulles notes that a theology of communication is closely connected with ecclesiology. His five models include: hierarchical; herald; sacramental; *communio*; and that of church studying the signs of the times.

F.J. Eilers, (ed.), Second Edition, *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents* (Logos Publications, Manila, 1997).

This volume contains all basic documents of the Catholic Church on Social Communication, including messages from the Pope on World Communication Days from 1967-1996. Eilers provides a helpful introduction for each document and a document text-numbering system making discussion easy.

F.J. Eilers, *Community in Communication: An Introduction to Social Communication* (Logos Publications, Manila, 1994).

A text for the introduction of social communication for ministry leaders based on a training program developed by the author. Helpful suggested readings and

Appendices. Included is a chapter on video planning for churches.

F.J. Eilers, *Communication Between Cultures* (Divine Word Publications, Manila, 1992). Helpful information about sharing knowledge, sentiments and experience by people of different cultures, moving from ethnocentrism to mutual respect. The author notes his interactive perspective 'is developed from Carey's cultural view while the theological basis is derived from Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication'.

D. Emmanuel, *Challenges of Christian Communication and Broadcasting: Monologue or Dialogue?* (Macmillan Press, London, 1999).

This volume examines the nature of true dialogue through an analysis of the historical development of attitudes towards communicative practices of Christian churches, particularly the Catholic Church.

T. Farrell and P. Soukup (eds.), *Communication and Lonergan: Common Ground for Forging The New Age* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1993).

An interdisciplinary attempt to explore how Lonergan's thought might apply to communication. Approaches include: rhetoric; 'intercultural communication; interpretation; interpersonal communication; postmodernist questions; and the ways in which communication interacts with culture'. A helpful glossary of Lonerganian terminology is included.

D. Felton, *The Unavoidable Dialogue: Five Interfaces Between Theology and Communication (Media Development, October, 1984).*

This document outlines interfaces and gives sources, determinants or horizons, concepts and categories, and frameworks for future study for each interface. The five are: theology and communication; communicative theology; systematic theology of communication; pastoral theology of communication; and Christian moral vision of communication.

B. Forbes and J. Mahan, *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (University of Californian Press, Berkeley, 2000).

Ranging from the religious themes in cowboy fiction to Madonna's 'Like a Prayer', from televangelism to the world of sports, contributors offer insights into what popular culture reveals about the nature of American religion today.

W. Fore, *Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture and the Media* (New York, Friendship Press, 1990).

G. Goethals, *The TV Ritual: Worship at the Video Altar* (Beacon, Boston, 1981).

This volume explores the symbolic environment in the U.S. created by the TV culture and how media challenge the communication of religious values.

G. Goethals, *The Electronic Golden Calf* (Cowley Publications, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990).

This book is ‘an attempt to understand the transformation and dispersal of the sacramental functions of images in a secular and pluralistic society.’ Goethals moves from high art to the advertisements on television in her exploration of the making of meaning and myths through visual media.

P. Granfield (ed.), *The Church and Communication* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1994).

Viewing the centrality of communication in the Catholic Church, this volume covers various themes: dialogue and participation; the communicative dimension of ecumenism; evangelization; the status of church communicators; and how interactive technologies are a metaphor for a more dialogic church.

A. Greeley, *God in Popular Culture* (Thomas More Press, Chicago, 1988).

The author develops a theology of popular culture and speaks of a theology of religious imagination. Many examples are media-based.

J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989).

B. Häring, ‘Ethics in Communication’ in *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Vol. 2 (Crossroad, New York, 1982).

In Chapter 3 Häring outlines a communication theology, along with a discussion of the mass media and the new situation presented by media.

J. Healey and D. Sybertz (eds.), *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1996).

This work deals with the challenge of inculturation in Africa today and describes the characteristics of a local African narrative theology of inculturation. Jesus is placed within the African context of healer, brother-intercessor, and victor over death.

M. Hess, *Media Literacy in Religious Education: Engaging Popular Culture to Enhance Religious Experience* (Doctoral Dissertation, Boston College, 1998).

The author uses Robert Kegan’s theorizing and participatory action research as a structure. She analyzes mass-mediated popular culture as a transformative resource for religious education in an age of pluralism.

S. Hoover, *Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church* (Sage Publications, Newbury Park, 1988).

An analysis of religious television in the light of the new religious consciousness in America, with special emphasis on Pat Robertson. A concluding chapter concerns the impact of the electronic church on American culture.

S. Hoover and K. Lundby (eds.), *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture* (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1997).

These significant essays show ‘there is a substantive, ontological, and authentic

dimension to meaning making that accompanies media behavior'. The authors do not argue that media *constitute* religion, but that media play a quasi-religious role in everyday life. There is a valuable bibliographical-review chapter and a concluding analysis of areas needing more study in the field.

S. Hoover and L. Clark (eds.), *Practising Religion in the Age of Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2002).

Topics range from Islam on the Internet to the quasi-religious practices of Elvis fans, from the uses of popular culture by the Salvation Army in its early years to the uses of interactive media technologies at the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance. The issues these essays address include the public / private divide, and the distinctions between the sacred and the profane.

P. Horsfield, *Religious Television: The American Experience* (Longman, New York, 1984).

The author writes of the development of religious television and covers research up to that time on: effects of paid-time religious programs; the size of the audience; audience characteristics; and the impact on the local church and on American culture.

I. Lawrence, *Linguistics and Theology: The Significance of Noam Chomsky to Theological Construction* (The American Theological Library Association, Metuchen, 1980).

A review of Chomsky's work as a model for theological problems with emphasis upon pluralism and God language.

B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1972).

D. Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2000).

A thoughtful analysis of the changing fortunes of religion in postmodern times.

J. Martin-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*, Trans. by E. Fox and R. White (Sage Publications, Newbury Park, 1993).

This work emphasizes the *mediation* process (defined as 'the articulation between communication practice and social movements'), rather than media content or ownership. This theory of socio-cultural mediations opens up a new approach to audience reception theory. The author notes: '... the receiver in the communication process is not simply a decoder of what the sender has put into the message but is also a producer of meaning'.

J. McDonnell and F. Trampiets (eds.), *Communicating Faith in a Technological Age* (St Paul Publications, Slough, 1989).

S. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1982).

C. Martini, *Communicating Christ to the World* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1994).  
A series of pastoral letters by the Archbishop of Milan.

A. Van der Meiden, 'Appeal for a More Communicative Theology', *Media Development*, 28:4, pp. 43-45.

The author calls for a communication-centered theology where communication is included *in* theology – rather than speaking of a 'theology of communication'.

J. Mitchell, *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999).

This volume explores: homiletics; radio history; music videos; British and American religious radio broadcasting; and communication theology. Mitchell investigates what preachers can learn from radio broadcasters in a media age. He stresses the importance of listening and translating public speech into 'accessible, conversational, and visual' language.

D. Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999).

This finely illustrated book examines the important role that American Protestants played in the formation of visual mass culture between 1820-1920.

D. Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (University of California, Berkeley, 1998).

One of the first, if not the first, book to examine the important role popular images have played in the formation and maintenance of American religious life.

H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, New York, 1951).

Recent communication/cultural studies research adds significant insights that go beyond this classic study. His model proposes: Christ Against Culture; The Christ of Culture; Christ Above Culture; Christ and Culture in Paradox (Dualists); and Christ and the Transformation of Culture. The author concludes: the world of culture exists within the world of grace.

W. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977).

Ong says 'the Word of God comes ... and is present ... within an evolving communication system'.

J. Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999).

Peters analyses the teachings of Socrates, Jesus, the theology of Saint Augustine, philosophy in the wake of Hegel, and the American tradition from Emerson to William James in relation to understanding communication today.

H. Peukert, 'Theological Reflections On Communication', *Media Development*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1981 [Entire issue devoted to theology and communication].

M. Pinsky, *The Gospel According to the Simpsons* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2001).

Pinsky considers several of the show's central characters, interviews a number of the show's writers and producers, and concludes with an examination of whether the show is subversive or supportive of faith.

F. Plude, *Communication Theology* (Vol. of *Catholic International*, Baltimore, Nov. 2001).

P. Rossi and P. Soukup (eds.), *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1994).

This collection of essays examines four topics: the context of mass media and moral reflection; moral dimensions of public life; using the media for moral development; and the importance of moral imagining (philosophically and theologically). Gender issues are considered – the shifting roles of women and the media, along with media economics.

J. Raja, *Facing the Reality of Communication: Culture, Church and Communication* (ISPCK, Delhi, 2001).

Drawing both on recent New Testament scholarship on parables and cultural studies findings on reception, Joshua makes a case for re-imagining the nature of Christian communication. He offers a number of signposts for understanding the audience for today's church.

R. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Orbis, Maryknoll, 1997).

This volume examines the impact of globalization on the contexts of theology, including the impact of new communication technologies. The work includes many communication-related issues such as: codes; cross-cultural issues; hierarchical control; intercultural issues and communication flows. Schreiter is a leader among theologians, incorporating communication and cultural studies concepts into his thinking and writing.

Q. Schultze, *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2000).

This book sets out to offer a 'perspective on communication that is anchored in a Christian world view'. Schultze believes that 'God created us to be stewards of symbolic reality'. His use of the stewardship theme is one of the most original elements of his argument.

P. Soukup, *Communication and Theology: Introduction and Review of the Literature* (World Association for Christian Communication, London, 1983).

This is a key review of the literature of theology and communication (as of 1983)

and it includes a thoughtful analysis of the growing dialogue between the two fields. Soukup establishes a framework for analysis including the following analogues: linguistic; aesthetic; cultural; dialogic; broadcast/mechanical; and theological. The author summarizes the main questions raised by the literature at this stage. An extensive bibliography is arranged in helpful categories.

P. Soukup (ed.), *Media, Culture and Catholicism* (Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1996). These essays highlight 'a significant shift for theology as it engages culture.' The volume includes Ong's important document on 'Communications Media and the State of Theology,' Greeley's analysis of Catholic Imagination concepts, along with other practical applications in liturgy, preaching, pastoral education, and dialogical forums.

D. Stout and J. Buddenbaum (eds.), *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1996).

A collection of essays on how religious audiences react to and use the mass media.

D. Stout and J. Buddenbaum (eds.), *Religion and Popular Culture: Studies on the Interaction of Worldviews* (Iowa State Press, Ames, 2001).

Divided into three parts, this book first offers theoretical discussion of the interplay between religion and the media of popular culture. The second part describes several world religions' (Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Eastern philosophies) teachings about media use. The third part presents case studies analyzing media uses, including the Southern Baptist's boycott of Disney products as well as a study of the uses of contemporary Christian music.

Symbolism, Media and the Lifecourse Project (University of Colorado, Boulder).

This is one of the largest on-going research projects in the U.S. on the meaning-making function of individuals and families as they view media. Papers and meeting summaries are available at [www.colorado.edu/Journalism/MEDIALYF](http://www.colorado.edu/Journalism/MEDIALYF)

K. Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997).

An exploration of the historical notion of culture and its modern meaning. She then explores theology as a part of culture, interactions between Christian culture and society, commonalities in Christian practice, and issues of diversity and its implications for theological creativity. The author contends that the anthropological notion of culture 'can be profitably employed in theology, setting new questions and new directions for theological research'.

T. Tilley, *Story Theology* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1991).

This work attempts to show 'that Christian stories provide the central and distinctive strength and content of Christian faith'. It constructs a narrative theology for Christians.

P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1959).

The author notes that the problem of religion and culture 'has always been the center of my interest'. The religious dimension appears in many spheres of cultural activity and he adds that 'this dimension, and not any ecclesiastical control of cultural creativity' is what he means by 'theology of culture'.

D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (Crossroad, New York, 1981).